



Testimony to Judiciary Committee
Stacey G. Sobel, Esq., Southport, CT
Executive Director, Child Advocates of SW Connecticut

RE: Bill No. 964, An Act Concerning Court Operations

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Chairman Winfield, Chairman Stafstrom, Ranking Member Kissel, Ranking Member Rebimbas, and members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am Stacey Sobel, resident of Southport, CT, testifying regarding Bill No. 964, An Act Concerning Court Operations, with a suggestion to improve the Bill.

As Executive Director of Child Advocates of SW Connecticut (CAC), we ask that language be added to Bill 964 to ensure implementation of the 2016 Connecticut CASA statute, section 46b-129c.

Action:

To ensure implementation of the CASA statute, we request that the Judiciary Committee include the following language, drafted by Senator Kevin Kelly, in Bill 964:

“That section 46b-129c of the general statutes be amended to: (1) **require** the Judicial Department to establish and administer the court appointed special advocate program, and (2) **ensure** that said program is administered in the Bridgeport Superior Court for Juvenile Matters”

Background:

Three years ago we sat in this very room testifying before the Judiciary Committee about the CASA bill. Seated behind us was James Comey, then Director of the FBI, and his wife Patrice Comey, then Connecticut foster parents. Patrice testified about why it was crucial that Connecticut adopt CASA legislation.

The CASA law permits all abused or neglected children in Connecticut’s child protection system to be helped by volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs). The law brings Connecticut in-line with the rest of the nation.

Thank you to this committee for the wisdom to unanimously pass Connecticut’s CASA law in 2016. But although the CASA bill was unanimously supported by the Judiciary Committee, was unanimously passed by both Houses of the State Legislature, and signed into law by the Governor, the 2016 law has yet to be implemented by the Judicial Branch except in the Stamford Court.

For three years, CAC has sought permission from the Judicial Branch to provide **NO COST** CASA volunteer advocates for over 1,100 abused or neglected children with cases in the Bridgeport Superior Court for Juvenile Matters.

For three years, thousands of Connecticut's most vulnerable children have not had the opportunity for the caring support of a community volunteer to advocate for their best interests in the community and the courtroom.

CAC is the **ONLY CASA** member organization that can provide CASA services in the Bridgeport Court.

CAC is **NOT** requesting funding to provide CASA volunteers for vulnerable children in the Bridgeport Court.

In conclusion:

3 years: Three years ago the CASA law was passed by this Legislative Branch and signed into law by the Executive Branch, but it has yet to be implemented by the Judicial Branch except in the Stamford Court.

1,100 children: Over 1,100 abused or neglected children served in the Bridgeport Court are not receiving the support and services of a **no-cost** volunteer CASA.

8,000 children: Over 8,000 abused or neglected Connecticut children statewide are not receiving the support and services of a volunteer CASA, that are currently provided to vulnerable children nationwide by over 950 CASA programs.

Please take action to ensure implementation of the Connecticut CASA law in the Bridgeport Court. CAC has trained volunteers waiting to help children NOW. CAC has a waiting list of volunteers waiting to be trained.

Thank you for your support of our vulnerable children.